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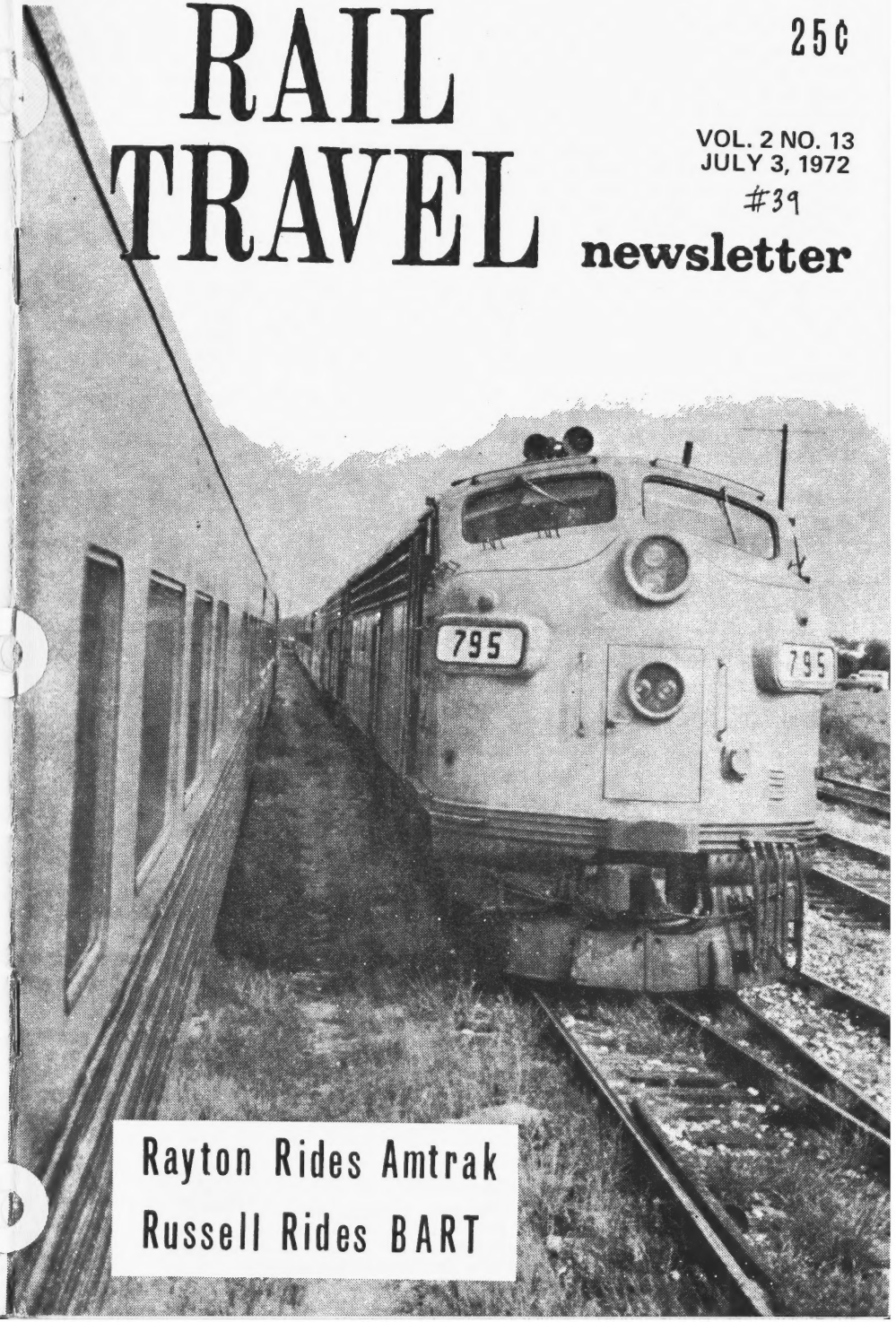

Rayton Rides Amtrak

Russell Rides BART

ON THE COVER:

(Front) the POTOMAC SPECIAL, better known as the "Harley Staggers Special," after the West Virginia Congressman at whose insistence the Washington DC to Parkersburg WV train was initiated, is seen in a meet on the 17-mile grade last June 3. Paul Rayton was aboard the westbound train, looking at its eastbound counterpart behind engine 795 as he made this photo.

(Rear) Paul Rayton's telephoto lens caught the SP engines on the eastbound CITY OF SAN FRANCISCO (now renamed the SAN FRANCISCO ZEPHYR) crossing the Sierras May 27. Had everyone aboard the train gone the route by auto, the pollution would have amounted to more than the train was making. Nevertheless, the aging condition of the FP7 engines causes them to belch too much smoke. See Paul's article starting on page 7.

IN THIS ISSUE we present a special feature—a report on a 9000-mile trip on Amtrak by Paul Rayton made in late May and early June. After waiting over a year for Amtrak to settle in, Paul now does his first evaluation on how things are going on the Amtrak trains over a major portion of the nationwide system.

Now, dear reader, an apology. We dislike being negative as much as you dislike reading negative reports. But we feel it necessary to report things as accurately as we see them. And for this reason we are worried about Amtrak. Most of our information coming in since the summer season began has been rather unfavorable. Not that people are not riding trains, or wanting to ride trains, but rather that for some reason the service seems to be going hardly any better than it was when the individual railroads were responsible for the trains. The most frequent complaints are of bad or missing equipment, great difficulties in getting tickets, reservations and information, and employees who remain surly, indifferent, uninformed, or lackadaisical. Amtrak clearly has a problem in attempting to get control of its operations. Money and lack of support from the Administration in Washington is one part of it, and this leads to slowness in refurbishing, repairing and buying equipment. In addition, wherever one goes, even in Washington itself, coordination and supervision of services are lacking. Amtrak has not yet grasped the reins tightly enough really to be in charge. The cynic could make a case that Amtrak is simply a holding operation until the trains die out altogether.

Now, we must balance this off with some optimistic thoughts, since we are basically optimists. This summer will prove, if it needed proving, that people want passenger trains. Rail travel is increasing all the time, despite operating difficulties. Amtrak is perhaps fortunate that so many people are inexperienced vis-a-vis trains and are uninformed about how good they can be. Enough people may just accept and like conditions, mediocre as they are, that they will continue to want to travel by rail.

A second optimistic note appears in our article on BART. After a first ride on one of its test trains, we will state without equivocation that the rapid transit system will be a sensation when it opens to the public.

STAFF VACATIONS at RTN are coming up this month, with the result that the next, July 17, issue will be out later than usual. We plan to mail it about August 1. The concluding installment of George Drury's travels on British Rail will appear in that issue.

MESSAGE MEDIA didn't forget the first anniversary of the U.S. Postal Service. We prepared a special souvenir postcard showing a snail—our comment on contemporary mail service. Price is $1 each, 6/$5. Also, a very special postcard that is the first philatelic mail to be carried aboard a BART train. Same price. Write to address below. Californians please add tax.

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CALL FOR AN INTERSTATE RAILROAD SYSTEM

Passenger trains are today limited to speeds much below those obtained decades ago in the U.S. Many steam trains at the turn of the century made far better times than today's Amtrak trains.

For this reason and others, including the fact that train derailments due to bad track and roadbed have increased a shocking 250% between 1963 and 1970, Senators Vance Hartke and Robert Taft Jr. (along with Senators Weicker, Pell, and Williams) introduced into the Senate on June 28 a major piece of legislation, the Interstate Railroad Act of 1972, designed to help improve track and roadbed conditions in this country.

Reasoning along the lines of the Interstate Highway system, which established a basic system of main superhighways, the bill will consolidate 82,000 miles of mainline track under the Secretary of Transportation. It would give railroads open access to all track and facilities of the system, and would offer a tax reimbursement and guaranteed loan package combined with a railroad rehabilitation fund financed by the carriers. The creators of the bill view the railroad rehabilitation fund as a close parallel to the present funding of road improvements by highway users.

In introducing the bill (bill S. 3769), Hartke criticized the rail industry for offering only "cost cutting ideas, not ones designed to win more business through improved service." Calling for a "fundamental search for creative public policy" and "a systems approach to planning and development," Hartke said that the time has come to treat railroads as a transportation system rather than a collection of proprietorships.

The bill requires that track in the system by maintained to allow smooth, dependable train operation at 80mph. However, with upgraded equipment, passenger trains could be expected to run up to 90 or 100mph on the track.

AMTRAK'S COMING INTERNATIONAL SERVICE

Amtrak's first train to Canada, the Seattle to Vancouver run, will roll July 17, the corporation announced June 30. The first Vancouver-Seattle run will take place the following day. Here is the tentative schedule of trains 194 (northbound) and 197 (southbound):

#194			#197
5:50p	Seattle		11:15a
6:20	Edmonds		10:37
6:41	Everett		10:12
7:30	Mt. Vernon/Burlington		9:25
8:08	Bellingham		8:48
	Blaine	LV	8:19
8:34	Blaine	AR	7:59
8:43	White Rock		7:47
9:13	New Westminster		7:20
9:45p	Vancouver		7:00a

Compared with the pre-Amtrak schedule of BN's INTERNATIONAL, the northbound run takes 10 minutes longer, the southbound 25 minutes more. The latter change is due to a 20-min stop in Blaine, Wash., for U.S. customs inspection. Previously this was done in the Vancouver station prior to departure. Canadian inspectors have in the past made inspections aboard the train enroute. Presumably this will still be done.

Amtrak did not indicate what equipment is to be used. It said the daily trains will connect with the tri-weekly COAST STARLIGHT as well as the EMPIRE BUILDER and NORTH COAST HIAWATHA. The CN station in Vancouver will be used.

The other coming international service, to Montreal and Nuevo Laredeo, Mexico, has not been announced yet because "operational, route and cost studies" are not complete. Route selection to Montreal has not been made, and "route, equipment and schedule studies by both Amtrak and Mexican National Railways" on the Mexican service are not finished.

Exploring the route to Montreal, Amtrak ran two test trains June 9—one from Montreal to Springfield, Mass., over Central Vermont and Boston & Maine tracks, one from Albany to Montreal on the Delaware & Hudson. High Green, publication of Chesapeake Div., Railroad Enthusiasts Inc., reports that the CV/B&M train left Montreal 8:30am for the first passenger run in 5 years, arriving Springfield at 6pm, an hour late because of a broken hose outside Northampton, Mass. Forty people were aboard, as residents turned out to greet the train all along the route.

CANADIAN NATIONAL CONDUCTOR KILLED IN SAN FRANCISCO HIJACKING

In a tale of tragic irony, a former Conductor on Canadian National's Montreal-Toronto route, E. H. Stanley Carter, Sr., age 66, was shot and killed in a shootout between FBI men and two hijackers aboard a Pacific Southwest Airlines jetliner at San Francisco International Airport July 5.

The two hijackers, both immigrants from Bulgaria, were killed in the shooting spree, and two more of the 81 passengers were wounded. Carter had retired from CN after making his last run August 11, 1970, and he and his wife were headed for San Diego to retire to their "dream home." True to fine railroad tradition, Carter died in style. His last words, the press reported, were "I'm shot. They've got me, Lil. I'm done for. Kiss me."

The well-liked Conductor's son publicly criticized the FBI for "playing Dick Tracy" at the expense of airline passengers. The junior Carter is a consultant to the Vancouver airport and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police on anti-hijack security.

Airline hijackings have become a subject of grave concern in recent months, and led to an attempted one-day pilots' strike last month to publicize the need for greater security. PSA, an intra-state California airline, was the very next day (July 6) hit by another hijacker across the bay at Oakland airport, but in that case there were no deaths nor injuries. (In RTN, May 15, we mentioned the radio jingle "The Atchison, Topeka, and the PSA." The airline has now dropped the words but plays the tune only.)

HIGHWAY DEATHS STILL ON THE INCREASE

The highway death rate is up alarmingly for the first half of 1972, reports the National Safety Council. Highway deaths took a slight dip in 1970, creating a barrage of propaganda from highway builders that safety was increasing because of the proliferation of freeways. However, in 1971 deaths were higher (see the special supplement in RTN, March 20) and so far this year they are increasing further.

The latest tally we have for the 4-day Fourth of July holiday just past shows that 749 people died in traffic accidents, a new all-time record for a similar 4-day holiday.

TRAIN TRAVEL DURING THE EASTERN FLOODS

Amtrak, in a June 29 press release, praised the railroads for their actions "in overcoming major problems caused by Hurricane Agnes and subsequent flooding in the East." Amtrak reported that the worst day was June 22, "when flood waters engulfed tracks from Pennsylvania to Virginia. NY-Washington service was disrupted for over 4 hours when a dam threatened to break near Baltimore." Slow orders remained in effect on the route until June 28.

Flooding at Harrisburg, PA, caused re-routing of the BROADWAY LTD and the NATIONAL LTD, both trains running from NY via Buffalo and Cleveland on the old New York Central main line. June 27, both trains resumed their normal routes, and Philadelphia-Harrisburg service was restored.

The Baltimore-Harrisburg line along the Susquehanna River was badly damaged, with restoration of service expected about July 20. Other flood reports have already appeared in Steve Farrar's East Coast Report.

Joseph Vranich of the National Association of Railroad Passengers was riding the BROADWAY LTD that arrived at New York's Grand Central Station June 24 during the re-routing. In a letter to Amtrak President Roger Lewis he reported in detail his experiences. Over 50% of the train's occupants were going beyond New York, and it was up to Amtrak to arrange a transfer to Penn Station to complete their journey. But the snafu was so great at Penn Station that Vranich was infuriated, terming the treatment he and the other passengers got as "Rude. Ill-mannered. Discourteous. Impolite. Uncivil. Ignorant. Harsh." Though Amtrak had 22 hours to prepare for the transfers, everything appeared chaotic. Said Vranich: "A truly national railroad passenger corporation should have been able to handle the communications problem..." and asked that all Amtrak employees meeting the public be required to wear a name badge.

East Coast Report

by Steve Farrar

AMTRAK/C&O SERVICE between Newport News and Charlottesville has not operated since June 21, as of this writing (July 5). Westbound train 99 terminated at Richmond June 21 because of flooding. Train service was reported operating only Chicago-Huntington for about 4 days; then service into Washington was resumed. Buses were provided Charlottesville-Norfolk. Damage to complex signal equipment on the first floor of Main St. Station, Richmond, is cited as a reason for cessation of passenger runs, but it is noteworthy that the freights never ceased running on the Newport News line. CTC signals began working again (but as automatic block) on July 3, but still no passenger train.

SOUTHERN RAILWAY service was disrupted July 2 at 3:15pm by a massive freight wreck on White Oak Mountain just north of Danville, VA. Service was restored about 32 hours later by a shoofly track. The detour route is not known. White Oak Mountain was also the downfall of SR's famous fast mail, "Old 97."

POTOMAC TURBO, removed after May 13 to replace Turbo on Boston-NY run (the latter went to Transpo 72 for exhibit), was slightly damaged in the move, so was out of commission until May 24. In the interim, a conventional train (E unit plus coaches) replaced the Boston-NY Turbo. The conventional train ran almost as fast as the Turbo...

HIGH SPEED test runs are now being made on the Chicago-Carbondale route with one of the Turbo trainsets.

AUTO-TRAIN fares went up June 21. The $190 now covers 2 persons and an auto, rather than 4 and a car. Each additional passenger is now $20, an increase from $15. Bedrooms remain at $40, but compartments for 3 people ($50) and staterooms for 4 ($65) are now available. Auto-Train apparently is undecided whether to initiate a second train on the same route or start a Cincinnati-Florida run. The latter, if adopted, might run on Southern Railway, terminating at Jacksonville. Reservations for the next Easter season are already filling up the present train.

THIS FALL Amtrak reportedly plans to run the EMPIRE BUILDER via Portland on its route to Seattle on the tri-weekly days on which the NORTH COAST HIAWATHA runs. The rest of the week it will maintain its usual route via Yakima.

ANOTHER RUN Chicago-Springfield via GM&O was scheduled to begin in late June, partly subsidized by the state.

TRIAL STEAM excursions on the Fort Eustis (VA) Military Railroad are expected to be operated on two Saturdays soon. Three trips would run each day. The nominal charge would benefit the Fort Eustis Transportation Museum. The locomotive to be used is Baldwin 2-8-0 No. 607, recently used in the deactivation ceremony of the Army's last railway battalion (see photo on page 20 of the last issue of RTN).

Mixed Train of Thoughts

LOS ANGELES (LAUPT) and LONG BEACH and ANAHEIM (American Pacific Stage Company)

9 25 AM	7 15 PM	Midnite	lve(Fare)LOS ANGELES	arr	9 30 AM	12 15 PM	6 45 PM
b	b	b	arr(1.75)Lakewood	lve	b	b	b
10 05 AM	8 00 PM	12 40 AM	arr(2.00)LONG BEACH	lve	8 45 AM	11 30 AM	6 00 PM
10 05 AM	8 00 PM	12 30 AM	arr(2.50)Anaheim-Disneyl'd	lve	8 40 AM	11 25 AM	5 55 PM
10 15 AM	8 10 PM	12 40 AM	arr(3.00)ORANGE	lve	8 30 AM	11 15 AM	5 45 PM

b Stops on call, Lakewood Shopping Center - Contact AMTRAK agent Breakers Hotel, Long Beach
Anaheim-Disneyland at Grand Hotel Orange, at Town and Country Pay fare to driver

ATTENTION EVERYONE: Above is schedule of new bus to Long Beach, Disneyland, Orange, etc., connecting both ways with all long distance trains at Los Angeles, with fares shown (pay the driver). Thru checked baggage service exists. This all began July 1, and hardly anyone knows about, so word needs spreading. Bus was pictured (bearing Amtrak arrow) in June 5 RTN—probably former UP train buses. Thanks to Robert J. Swan for this info..... TWO NEWSPAPERS

editorializing against putting the Amtrak tracks at San Clemente, CA, inland are the Long Beach Independent Press-Telegram and the L.A. Herald Examiner. Good for them. Says the IP-T:"The railroad does indeed add a picturesque quality to the beach. Swimmers can pick flowers from between the ties. Residents on the bluffs above can gaze upon trains and fishing boats at once... the railroad is a congenial presence on the beach. The other works of man that would probably replace it might not be"..... RTN READER Stephen Brown of Manchester, Mich., reports the westbound thru cars via NATIONAL LTD and SUPER CHIEF that left NY June 30 were a Penn Central coach and an SP slpr. Passengers refused to ride in the PC car they called a "cattle car." Santa Fe Conductors had pity on them and gave them space in the EL CAPITAN. Brown also rode the CHIEF eastbd a few days ago and reports a "shabby" dining car and a Santa Fe lunch counter-dorm. "What kind of dining and lounge space is that for a transcontinental train?" The advertised dome was also missing..... AUTO-TRAIN got some bad press in an Associated Press article (see L.A. Times July 5). (But then the AP has never been fond of trains, anyway.) A bad trip was reported in which the train was oversold and some riders had to sit in an uncomfortable nightclub car. Other things went wrong. AUTO-TRAIN acknowledged the problems and is correcting them. At least they acknowledge them. A certain nationwide passenger rail system we know often sweeps them under the carpet..... SPEAKING OF AUTO-TRAIN, the June issue of Hotel and Motel Management carried an article, "Auto-Train: Boon or Threat?" Their conclusion: Boon. Anything that makes people travel helps hotel business.....

DAY WITHOUT Daylights: July 3 a freight wreck occurred on SP's hill north of San Luis Obispo. Like the real heads-up organization it is, Amtrak ran both DAYLIGHTS close to the scene and "stubbed" the trains (bused passengers from one to the other and headed back to their origins). Right? Wrong. They cancelled both trains. Just to show that SP is still running the show, the railroad laughed in Amtrak's face when the corporation phoned from Washington to request the trains re-routed thru the San Joaquin Valley. (Two more freight wrecks have happened there in the few days since then, and one delayed coast trains about 3 hours)..... FIRST REFURBISHED SP dome lounge, fresh from the Kratville shops with new paint (Amtrak logos but SP number, since it is not owned by Amtrak; new carpet; new upholstery; new wood-like paneling) came deadheading into Oakland June 29 on the SF ZEPHYR, then sat gathering dust in the SP yards until it finally was used on the train July 8. A second such car deadheaded in July 9 and hasn't been seen since. Yep. A real heads-up organization..... AMTRAK MIGHT end up carrying more mail than people in the cattle cars it's using. The Wall Street Journal (July 6) reports at length on Amtrak's efforts to carry more mail and publications. It is going directly to publishers such as Time magazine to solicit business, since it can in many cases offer better service than other carriers..... SAN FRANCISCO reader has worked out the fairness of Amtrak's new fares in terms of percent higher cost of roomette over coach travel, and discovered that eastern routes generally cost more first class than western ones, despite Amtrak's attempt at equalizing the nationwide fare structure. Percent of cost of roomette over coach ranges from 38% on SUPER CHIEF to 128% on GEORGE WASHINGTON. He also asks why not group plans instead of family plans only for fare reductions?..... FLYING SCOTSMAN ended its excursion runs in San Francisco early in June. It will soon be sent to Tracy, CA, over WP for storage for awhile..... AMTRAK REFUSED special trains for delegates to the national conventions in Miami because of equipment shortage. Two years ago there were 4 times as many cars running around the nation. In addition, says the Washington Evening Star (June 19), about 40% of Amtrak's 2000 cars are being repaired or refurbished at any given time..... PURE WHITE pottery with no decorations is what Amtrak has ordered to stock its diners nationwide..... TWO AMTRAK offices in Los Angeles have been consolidated into one, SP and ATSF sharing the work..... COMPARED WITH lengthy difficulty of getting simple trip tickets here in the U.S., a Los Angeles man reports he got a complicated Canadian National trip worked out with one 7-minute phone call. His itinerary came promptly in the mail with fares spelled out and a request for a check by a certain date.....

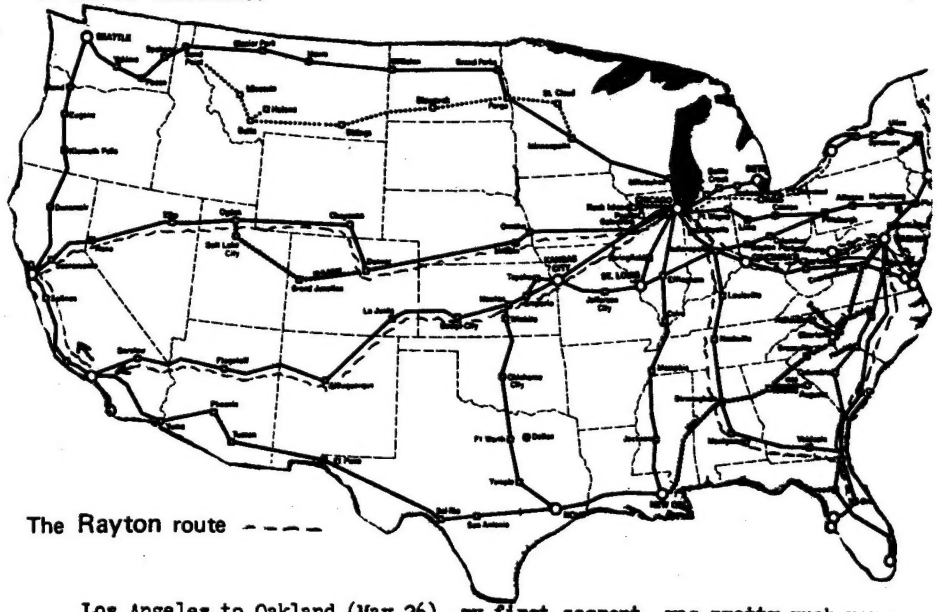
KEEPING TRACK

A REPORT ON AMTRAK

by Paul Rayton

"If we can just get by this holiday rush, we'll be all right. We'll have a chance to get organized and when the summer rush gets here, we'll show people what we can do" So said an Amtrak spokesman last December in the Chicago Sun-Times.

Naturally his assessment involved a bit of crystal ball gazing, but in view of my experiences in well over 9000 miles of rail travel, Amtrak is not ready for an off season, let alone running trains for the demanding crush of summer travelers.



The Rayton route - - - -

Los Angeles to Oakland (May 26), my first segment, was pretty much routine. We left suburban Glendale 5 minutes late and spent the day getting later. We hadn't even departed the Los Angeles area when, in the San Fernando Valley, we were stopped on a siding while not one but two "priority" freights went past in the other direction.

This was the Friday of Memorial Day weekend, and anybody would have expected plenty of business. Anybody but Amtrak, that is. Every seat of the four coaches (the same-size consist used during the off season) was occupied, totaling some 170 passengers. Several of us fortunate ones boarding at Glendale were deposited in the "overflow" car—a deadheading Santa Fe sleeper. Counting the 10 in the deadhead car plus 20 first-class passengers, the total load was some 200.

The dining car, an ex-SP "Pride of Texas" diner-lounge, could seat at the most 32 patrons. You may imagine the scene shortly after noon as all 200 passengers began thinking about lunch. The lounge space of the car was pressed into service as a waiting line. Upwards of 30 waiting people stood in the cramped area.

I, trying to avoid some of the line-standing, waited until 2:30pm to join the then-shorter line. Even then I had to wait a full 60 minutes before being seated! Who assigned that dining car on Memorial Day weekend?

We almost made up some late time between San Jose and Oakland (the timetable allowed 90 minutes to go 53 miles), but arrived in Oakland still nearly an hour late, resulting in many people with ruined plans for the evening.

Photos by Paul Rayton.

The next day, the CITY OF SAN FRANCISCO departed 5 minutes late in spite of Oakland terminal employees who wandered around the area lackadaisically, almost oblivious to getting the train on its way. Time, however, is something the CITY has plenty of. The schedule is so padded with adipose minutes that one wonders how in heaven's name it could ever be late.

Be that as it may, the trip on the CITY was one of the best rides of my sojourn. The reasons for this are easily identified—the crew and equipment were outstanding.

Actually the equipment wasn't all that much, but oh, that SP-built dome car! It can save a day (or a trip) and elevate the lowliest train into an experience. Saturday was "Burlington crew" day on the CITY, and to a man the train crew (porters and dining car employees) were veterans of the CALIFORNIA ZEPHYR. They all had that intangible savoir faire developed from long experience on one of the best trains in the country. Crossing Colorado, for instance, Mr. Hall, the Steward, reminded me that should I want wine with dinner that evening, I would need to be seated by 7:30pm, before we entered dry-on-Sundays Nebraska.

On the other hand, a certain number of negative impressions remain. Crossing the Sierras, scenery viewing was frequently spoiled by the poor condition of one of the Southern Pacific engines pulling us. Great fountains of dense black smoke would belch forth at each acceleration. And trains can be so non-polluting!

The DENVER ZEPHYR is a popular train, as evidenced by this line of passengers checking their tickets to Chicago. This is the Denver station last May 28. Here in Denver Paul got a glimpse out his train window of a former NEBRASKA ZEPHYR car sitting behind a Burlington engine. His grab photo was unfortunately too technically marred for reproduction here. The photo here should help put to rest once and for all the old lie about only "old ladies" riding trains.

The train was loaded with reminders of how good trains really used to be, brought home in bittersweet memories. The dining car was a former CALIFORNIA ZEPHYR car (CB&Q #194, "Silver Diner"), and investigation revealed that the old ZEPHYR sound system (an Ampex tape machine) was still in place, missing only the tape. The next car back was a former CZ sleeping car ("Silver Butte"). It could have been used in conjunction with that tape deck to have music in the rooms...except the control knobs for individual room adjustments had gone the way of the CZ itself.

Nor were the windows of the train washed in Denver—the CZ used to do that. That leaves only the SUPER CHIEF/EL CAPITAN on the list of trains favored with en-route washings.

And, as other writers have mentioned, the BN track east of Denver is hardly acceptable for 79mph operation. Between Holdredge and Hastings the watchword was "batten down the hatches!" The Porter seemed to feel that east of Lincoln it would be smoother. I didn't notice much improvement.

The CITY had not been exactly loaded with passengers. Leaving Oakland there had been about 60 in coach, 40 in sleeping cars. This was the load on Memorial Day weekend, on a train that ran only three days per week! Where was everybody? The load increased slightly as we progressed east, and the load tripled to some 200 coach passengers in Denver, where 4 cars were cut in to accommodate the new riders.

Arrival in Chicago was about 10 minutes early. I had now arrived at the point where the trip really started to go to hell.

To begin with, train announcements were unintelligible in the main waiting room of Chicago Union Station. Then, I was put off by the behavior of the Amtrak ticket clerk with whom I dealt. She "talked down" to me as if I were a second grader.

I was due to depart on the GEORGE WASHINGTON at 1:50pm. We didn't leave on time, being held for a late-arriving SUPER CHIEF. We lurched into motion at 2:18, which proved an accurate preview of the trip.

This train, to Newport News and Norfolk, is one of Amtrak's "problem" routes—one where customers are few. Based on my trip, the impression that evolved was that the problem was the way the train was run. This crummy train must have precipitated the patronage problems, not the reverse.

There was one good thing. Although we left Chicago almost a half-hour late, we were nearly on time into Cincinnati, and east of Cincy we were on schedule.

Now consider the unpleasant aspects. On boarding the train, the Conductor asked me, "Where to?" and I replied, "Newport News." "Car to your right," he said. Several hours later I realized that the "car to my right" was not the car going to Newport News. He had sent me to the car going to Washington DC. Visions of carloads of people ending up in the wrong city crossed my mind.

The crew as a whole were rude and unhelpful on the Penn Central. After Cincinnati, where a C&O crew came on, things were a little better. There we even gained a Porter for the two coaches.

For a variety of reasons I had elected not to eat in the Chicago station, but to have lunch in the train's dining car. I walked in. "Sorry! We can't serve you! We don't have any steam in this car so we can't make any food!" announced a waiter. (Remember we sat in Union Station for almost a half hour but nobody had made any effort there to fix this problem prior to departure.) Result: we made extra-long stops in Homewood and Kankakee while crew members climbed around under the train pounding on various connections. After 15 minutes in Kankakee, steam started flowing again. It was then 4:15pm, and I had a rather late lunch.

The roadbed and track east of Kankakee are terrible. The only way to run trains safely is by slow order. We rocketed across Indiana at 35mph.

We did have a dome car, an ex-SP&S EMPIRE BUILDER veteran. The windows were dirty, inside and out. The first seat I tried in the dome was missing a bolt and it almost dumped me unceremoniously on the linoleum floor...some

The GEORGE WASHINGTON dome coach to Charlottesville has just arrived with Paul Rayton aboard.

tiles of which were loose, I noted. Even the seat arrangement was loused up —half faced forwards, the balance rearwards. And the seats were welded into this asinine position! Very few wanted to ride the dome seats backwards, particularly with the frequent loud whacks and thumps which filled the dome as trees along the unkempt right-of-way bashed into the forward-looking dome windows. We waited expectantly for a pane to crack, but the engineer usually managed to slow for the biggest branches. (Wait till fall—you can pick apples from the GEORGE WASHINGTON!)

In my "assigned" coach, C&O coach #1649, built by Pullman, the seat covers were disgusting—unbelievably dirty and stained, and the seats themselves were real back-breakers. The men's room was a disgrace. In addition to an overpowering odor, one wash basin would deliver barely a trickle of cold water, and in the other I found the drain control knob rolling around in the bowl. No amount of fiddling with the temperature control device would produce hot water. (The SP&S car at least had hot and cold running water.) The drinking water outlet was located in the center portion of the car. When people pushed the button for water, it would continue running until the gurgling of the drain aroused someone (often me) from their seat to jab at the sticking valve and finally shut it up.

In spite of the fact that it was after 11pm when we arrived in Cincinnati, the Conductor had never bothered to turn down the coach lights, indifferent to the many people trying to rest. Having left Cincinnati, I waited 15 minutes before asking the new Conductor if we might get the lights in the coach turned out. "As soon as I finish my work, buddy." For whom, exactly, was this train being run—him? Or the poor passengers who pay to ride this thing? There was a full dining car with lights and tables and no sleepy passengers in which he could have done his bookwork.

The C&O roadbed was pretty bumpy too. I'd grade it C-. It must have been better than the PC, but here we traveled faster. Sleep was difficult.

Morning found no hot water in either coach despite valiant efforts to produce same by yours truly. Finally, shaving kit in hand, I walked as inconspicuously as possible into the lone sleeping car—the last stand of the hot water—and shaved there.

The train, I noted, advertised "limited checked baggage service." Limited indeed—it was a roomette, accompanied by a man who moved things in and out.

Patronage was light. Fifteen coach, 10 sleeper out of Cincinnati, and although we brought 35 or 40 (coach) into Charlottesville, more than half branched off toward Washington and when we reached Newport News only 7 passengers remained to straggle off the train.

I don't expect to ride train #50 again.

I had higher expectations for train #643, the POTOMAC SPECIAL, Washington to Parkersburg, WV. Granted, it was another "problem" route, but Amtrak had been, so I read, market-testing and trying to improve business. The TURBO was gone now. Amtrak had rescheduled the service and announced the train would be "refurbished Amtrak cars."

Therefore, I arose late that Saturday (June 3) and planned to eat breakfast on the train. I boarded about 3 minutes before departure, just to discover—with a kind of sinking feeling—that the "meal and beverage service" consisted of a wooden board, wrapped in paper, flopped across two coach seats, with a pile of pre-made sandwiches plus assorted drinks. A quick summit conference was held. Should I kiss off the whole trip, or go anyway? Reason did not prevail, and I and the train departed together promptly at 11am.

The train consisted of two coaches and one engine. But even the Wabash "MOTHBALL" in its dying days offered equal or better service. I chose a nice seat in an ex-New Haven car, that being the cooler of the two. There were only 5 useable windows in the whole car, the other 13 having been replaced with Lexan plastic. Lexan may be good for commuter trains in Penn Central's rock-throwing war zones, but assigning to a scenic route like this a car with scratched plastic windows seemed simply inept planning. (The trouble with Lexan is that the grit accumulation on a train's exterior scratches the windows when the cars are washed, and you might as well be looking through a glass of milk.)

Along B&O's commuter line to Silver Spring we zipped along at 79mph. Things were all right for about an hour. And then...

At Harpers Ferry the air conditioning in the ex-NH car quit. I recalled then that men had been fiddling around with it in Washington. I had only vaguely noticed it at the time, but now the reality of their actions was coming home. The whole car, it developed, was mechanically on its last legs, a typical product of PC "workmanship." Additionally the car had no hot water.

Moving back to wash in the other car, ex-B&O coach #5507, I found two wash basins. One could produce no water at all. The other functioned minimally, but still had no hot water. And all water in this latter car was an ugly reddish brown. Out of curiosity I gave the water from the drinking water outlet the color test. Again a reddish fluid came out.

West of Harpers Ferry the roadbed became rougher. At Cumberland, the first crew-change, the train halted at the Amtrack (sic) station. Brakemen fiddled with fuses and such, but that air conditioning unit was a basket case.

The famous old Cumberland Station Hotel lay in piles of rubbish beside the tracks. "Kind of sums up the whole rail passenger situation, doesn't it?" remarked another traveler to me.

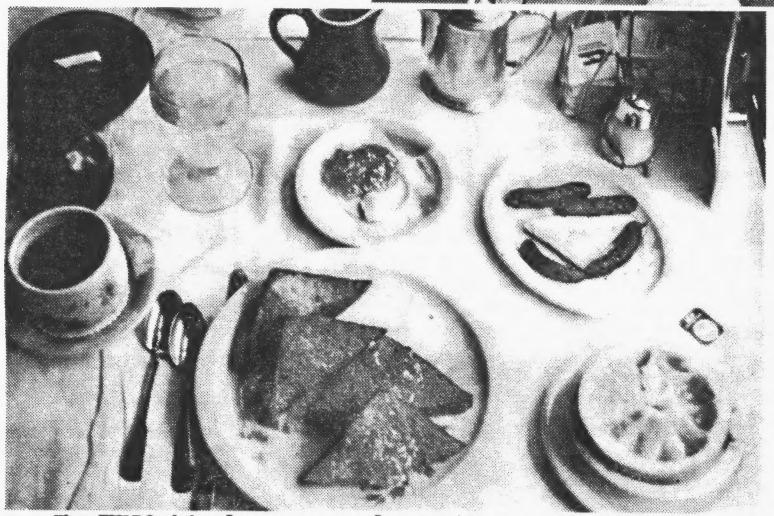
At Grafton, WV, a dead pigeon lay on the steps of the very deserted station. A note was taped to the front door about the refurbished Amtrak equipment coming onto the route. I got a rueful chuckle out of that one, especially as I heard Conductor and Brakeman commiserating "That (meaning defective equipment) is the same thing that happened last night, all the cars except the diner-lounge (which must have been in the other set of equipment). And they were Amtrak-rebuilt cars, too."

The ex-NH car was uninhabitable, especially over the mountains. If the doors had been opened for air, a veritable storm of brakeshoe dust would have blown through.

Meanwhile in the B&O car, the snack bar attendant was selling the 80¢ sandwiches, and drinks at Amtrak's new nationwide price of $1.35. He had no refrigeration, so I (and only out of desperation) bought a sandwich before the bacteria count climbed too high. He did have a sack of ice in a leaky picnic basket. The resultant melt-water dripped all over the floor and then proceeded to flow up and down the aisle. We were trapped in this car, though, with its undrinkable water and its small lake. I never did find the "magazine library" promised on the equipment list.

At Joliet, IL, Paul photographed the TEXAS CHIEF heading for Chicago under UP power on June 9. The railroad name was painted out on the engines, which had been on the train since about June 1.

A contrast in Amtrak food service: (right) The POTOMAC SPECIAL offered pre-made sandwiches sold off a board slung across two coach seats. Beverages sat in a box of ice below, which leaked all over the car. (below) The DENVER ZEPHYR was a different story. Paul photographed his breakfast of French Toast just after polishing off the grapefruit. A Burlington crew formerly on the CALIFORNIA ZEPHYR was working the diner when Paul rode, and they did things in old CZ style. On alternate days, SP and UP dining car crews work the train between Chicago and San Francisco.



The TURBO debacle was a popular topic among the railroad workers. "Very unreliable," they said. Tales of breakdowns and rough riding were prevalent. The 81 miles between Clarksburg and Parkersburg were covered by the POTOMAC SPECIAL under a 40mph speed limit. The TURBO had been allowed all of 45mph, but at that speed it was so rough it "like to have thrown you right out of them there upstairs seats," said a Brakeman. At Parkersburg 7 passengers detrained. Only two had come from Washington.

There were no timetables in the station, no agent on duty (other than a freight crew dispatcher), and no train information number was posted. I did find an ancient B&O listing with a phone number which, the operator told me, had been changed to a toll-free "Enterprise" number. I soon found myself connected to a recording. I had reached the B&O ticket office in Baltimore but they were only open 8-5 weekdays. At any other time, I'd have to call long distance to Washington for information. As luck would have it, I needed train information and had to call. They only kept me on "hold" for 10 minutes at that pay telephone. In fact every stop along the 200-plus miles beyond Cumberland had the same useless "toll-free" service (since, on 5 days out of 7, the train didn't leave Washington until 4:30pm...)

The return trip the next day was more or less a carbon copy of the outbound trip. Overnight the train had been "serviced"—which meant that the

floor had been swept. Prior to departure from Parkersburg, some road mechanics were shaking their heads in disbelief that Washington yards would send out "such a collection of junk."

I had to laugh at the whole scene, it was so sadly funny. The new Conductor and Brakeman who came on today didn't (of course) know about the malfunctioning car and thought that maybe they could fix the problem. They, too, fiddled around with the fuses—to no avail. Finally I told them that it had been defective yesterday and not to feel bad if it didn't work.

The B&O car next gave indications of breaking down for this return trip. About half an hour out of Parkersburg the Conductor came and announced, sweat on his brow and a note of pride in his voice, "I've got the compressor in this coach working!"

The "meal" service was attended by the same man as the day before. And he had the same stale sandwiches that he'd had yesterday. He'd managed to "preserve" a few overnight in his ice pack.

At least we arrived back in Washington on time.

Next I rode the Seaboard Coast Line, destination Florida. During the course of several rides involving both the SILVER METEOR and the CHAMPION, it became abundantly clear that the METEOR was held in highest esteem by Amtrak. The METEOR, if anything, was Amtrak's prestige train on the East Coast. The cars were in the best condition and included some Amtrak interior/exterior refurbished cars. The METEOR also carried the ex-SP "Recreation Car" with Sony color TVs that had run on the FLORIDA SPECIAL, plus a separate first-class lounge. During dinner on the METEOR, Amtrak girl Deborah Reale came through and announced that at 8pm "tonight's movie will be 'Plaza Suite,' in the Recreation Car." And the METEOR was the only train Amtrak had favored with its new strip map of the train's cars, to help keep people oriented.

Passing Lorton, VA, I caught a glimpse of the just-departing AUTO-TRAIN.

The CHAMPION, on the other hand, had something of the appearance of the unwanted child. Yes, it had most necessary services, like the superb SCL menu in the dining car, but that was about all. If you thought the POTOMAC SPECIAL had mechanical problems, the CHAMPION was a disaster area. Hot cars. Flat wheels. Missing equipment. (Southbound on June 6 there was no lounge car. "Broke down," they said. What? no backup cars?)

The most worrisome aspect to me was the physically unsound condition of the equipment. Fully half—and probably more—of the cars on June 6 had flat wheels and/or badly "searching" trucks. I doubt that there was a round wheel in the lot. If I had been an ICC car inspector, I would have ordered the train into the nearest siding. Some ex-SP SUNSET coaches rumbled so badly on account of their bad running gear that I wondered just what kept them from unscrewing themselves on the spot—the paint?

Air conditioning failures and dirty windows are one thing, but this incredible incidence of flat wheels was another story entirely. Batteries and air conditioning may be replaced, but when trucks go this bad, it means they are due for "heavy servicing"—immediately. And heavy servicing isn't cheap.

By the time we reached Jacksonville, FL, I was exasperated and angry at the wholesale operation of so many execrable trains under the banner of pleasant travel. On the station platform I spied an Amtrak Passenger Service Agent. (He managed to conceal his identity by holding a clipboard over his nametag.) I asked him if he would be riding further south on the CHAMPION with us. No, he wouldn't. "Well," I told him, "you'll be missing a rare treat. This whole train should be bad-ordered on the spot and sent in for an overhaul." He didn't reply, but stood there meekly—wishing I would go away—and apparently baffled by the term "bad order."

Next came the FLORIDIAN, which proved to be another series of cars with mechanical problems. Of the four dome cars assigned to this train, three were bad-ordered and in the shops (they must have to be pretty awful to be taken out of service!) and of course the fourth dome was not in our particular consist.

When the air conditioning broke down in the (ex-SP "Pride of Texas") dining-lounge car, it did so with a flair. It created its own rainstorm from the ceiling ducts during breakfast.

The sleeping car (ex-UP #1431, "Pacific Path") was beginning to fall apart. In my room alone I noted that the window shade was badly ripped, the mattress sagged, the room fan switch was falling out of its wall mounting, and some dolt had installed one of those damn Lexan windows in this bedroom! Sightseeing was impossible. Meanwhile the hallway carpet hadn't been cleaned in weeks. It was so dirty down through the roomette section that it was impossible to distinguish its natural color.

Finally, the ride quality deserves special mention. The SCL trackage was quite good. North of Montgomery, AL, the L&N roadbed wasn't anything special. But my Lord! North of Louisville! Good old rotten PC track, but this was undeniably the rottenest I've ever encountered. The usual slow orders in effect over this track limited us to 10mph over many stretches, and 35 for most of the route. It is clear that Penn Central is not maintaining its tracks, but is just progressively lowering the speed limits. Wait until next spring when the snow melts...

Meanwhile, the FLORIDIAN was rocking crazily, like a rowboat bobbing in heavy seas. Every once in a while—heard even in my center-of-car bedroom, the place least likely to hear track noises such as this—there would be an incredible K-L-U-N-N-G-G-G-K reverberating down the length of the car as the train hit a particularly bad joint (or something) in the rails. I prayed that the Engineer would slow down. Please, dear God! Save this train!

I had never before spent a night in a train when I was literally afraid for my life. I could visualize, lying there in the darkness of the bedroom, a sudden strange feeling as we careened off a bridge into a river. Trapped in a bedroom, underwater! And once we started bouncing so severely that—besides being lifted bodily off the bed—I was absolutely convinced that the car would bounce off the tracks. It was a hell of a ride.

To cap it all off, an elderly couple from Florida had been sold tickets to Flagstaff. They were to change trains at Montgomery! The ticket agent who sold that ticket must have a fertile imagination. So the poor folks decided to ride on to Chicago and try for seats on the EL CAPITAN. The lady wore a 50-year pin from ACL. Wonder what she thinks of Amtrak?

Despite slow orders and everything else, the FLORIDIAN arrived—in one piece—in Chicago 15 minutes early.

The last leg of my odyssey, Chicago to Los Angeles, was on the SUPER CHIEF. And, reservations-wise, the trip on the SUPER, too, was a horror show. That Chicago reservations "system" is a candidate for early retirement.

The train departed amid a barrage of signs from Continental Airlines advertising the "Los Angeles Expressway." Fortunately the ride itself was a return to sanity from the madness prevading the other trains. Who else but the Santa Fe would have kept their yard workers adept in some of the fine points of servicing cars, like greasing the plates in the vestibules of sleeping cars so they don't squeak? And it was a real pleasure to walk down an aisle without imminent danger of being bruised by an untoward jolt. All music systems performed beautifully.

No trip anymore seems to be without its problems. The air conditioning in the dome lounge car (of all places) quit. But that was partially compensated for by our having been assigned space in "Regal Ruby," a 4/4/2. We found ourselves traveling in a compartment for a bedroom price.

Reviewing the trip as a whole, food service on the trains deserves special mention. SCL is to be complimented, ex post facto, on their fine menus and good crews. The SCL dinner menu was a marvel of dining car provisioning. Five vegetables from which to choose at dinner, for instance. I lament the passing of it (as of June 15) to the new Amtrak "Scott Towel" menu with its sole "vegetable of the day." Anyone now who makes an extended trip on Amtrak is going to get extremely tired of the same frozen green beans every night (and mixed vegetables for lunch). The SCL crews were selling freshly-made turkey sandwiches for 50¢—which same item would have cost 80¢ on that POTOMAC SPECIAL and would have been days older.

The SUPER CHIEF, of course (as reported in RTN some time ago), remains now as the only train in the country with a "super" menu—and that mainly at the continuing insistence of the Executive Department of the Santa Fe Railway. Letters supporting this determination by the ATSF to keep the integrity of the SUPER CHIEF are important now, as Amtrak still wants to "economize" at the expense of the train. Once again, as you read this, the Champagne Dinner is in jeopardy. Write to the Santa Fe in Chicago.

In summary, it was a rather saddening trip. Amtrak has been in corporate existence since Oct. 31, 1970, or over one and one-half years. Naturally they have only been running the trains for slightly over a year, but bearing in mind (1) the assertion that the summer of '72 was to be the real showpiece, the "show what we can do" summer and (2) the sums allegedly being expended to improve the equipment, I cannot see but what this summer will lead to vast numbers of dissatisfied patrons, with a resultant bad press that will hurt future funding for Amtrak.

To make a rather sweeping generalization, where service was good before Amtrak, it is still good. But where service pre-Amtrak was bad, things are horrid.

I find it hard to believe that Amtrak is actually paying workers to dispatch trains in conditions such as I observed. I hope Amtrak has laid in a good supply of scotch tape for summer repairs, that seeming to be the favored technique in servicing. That is, they fix something just well enough to get it out of the yards, and let the next guy worry about its subsequent re-breakdown.

I find the defects in the "completely refurbished" cars particularly worrisome. Why waste money on cosmetics when the whole undercarriage is rotten?

Yes, the summer is here. And with it the chance (some say the last) for Amtrak's trains to run well, attract travelers, and impress people. What I saw did not bode well for another Amtrak summer.

Amtrak

Canada news letter

CN's SUPER CONTINENTAL is running in two sections now, but consists are smaller than last year, so far. In 1971, the Toronto SUPER was 4 coaches, 8 sleepers; Montreal 3 coaches, 8 sleepers. In each 1971 section, 2 sleepers were heavyweights in "dormette" service. CN cut a lot of these up over the last winter (some nearly 50 years old), and Toronto section now has only one hvywgt dormette car, Montreal section none...

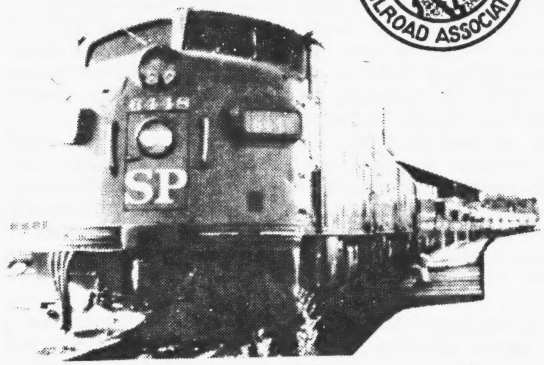
New airline-style "day-niter" luxury car on the Montreal section (new 5700-series) runs behind the buffet-lounge car in an effort to keep the "hippies" from the coach section out of it. CN personnel are worried about the huge influx of hippies on the low CN coach fares. Some CN men say they wouldn't want to wish CN coach travel on any decent and normal person. The "day-niter" is an attempt to keep some coach business at the market level which is not anxious to go sleeper, but doesn't want to travel steerage...

Toronto section carries the "Auto-With-You" boxcar at rear of train, and in Edmonton cars are unloaded about 10 short blocks west of the station. On July 3 the Toronto westbound carried 2 autos (capacity 6). Fares are $188 for the auto, plus 2 sleeping car tickets...

No word on CN's bid to abandon the Edmonton-Grande Centre daylinor. City Hall types expect that Canadian Transport Commission will order it continued (see RTN, Apr. 17), but will allow Northern Alberta Railways to eliminate its twice-weekly overnight train to northeast B.C. NAR train service was cut 2 weeks in mid-June by floods on the line west of McLennan, Alta. NAR passenger trains operated Edmonton-McLennan for that period...

—Glenn Lee

OAKLAND SAN FRANCISCO BERKELEY



SPARKS SET-OUT

Saturday and Sunday, August 5 & 6, 1972

Plan to join us the first weekend in August when we operate a sleeper from Oakland to Sparks, Nevada on AMTRAK's SAN FRANCISCO ZEPHYR. Combine a daylight ride over the Sierras in both directions with the opportunity a full night in the Reno-Sparks area offers. There's no need to worry about hotel accommodations either, as our sleeping car will be parked for overnight occupancy at the Sparks depot. Most kinds of Pullman accommodations are available, including upper and lower berths (remember the green curtains?). The SAN FRANCISCO ZEPHYR carries a full diner and lounge. ALL ABOARD!

SCHEDULE

Lv.	*9.00 AM AUG 5	SAN FRANCISCO	AUG 6	*3.25 PM	Ar.
Lv.	9.30 AM AUG 5	OAKLAND	AUG 6	2.55 PM	Ar.
Ar.	3.55 PM AUG 5	RENO	AUG 6	7.30 AM	Lv.
Ar.	4.10 PM AUG 5	SPARKS	AUG 6	7.15 AM	Lv.

*Bus connection direct to trainside leaves AMTRAK Travel Center, Bridge Term., 1st & Mission (street level, rear of building).

FARES PER PERSON

Upper Berth	$50.00	Bedroom for 1	$80.00
Lower Berth	$55.00	Bedroom for 2	$60.00
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A deposit of $25 per person holds space until July 24.

Need more information? Call (415) 673-6547 evenings.

John C. Plytnick, Excursion Manager
Bay Area Electric Railroad Association
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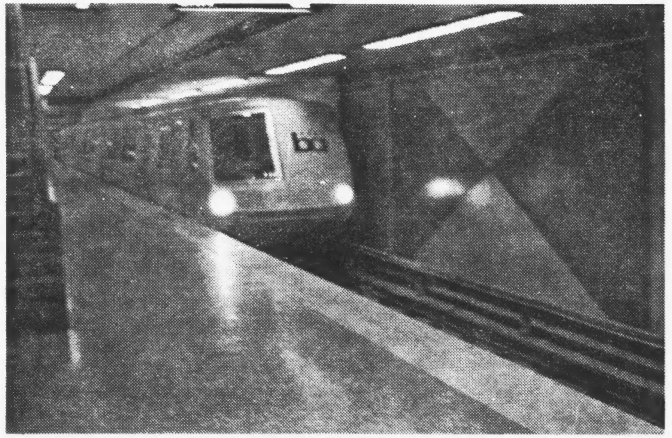
A First Ride on BART

by Jim Russell



Photos by the author.

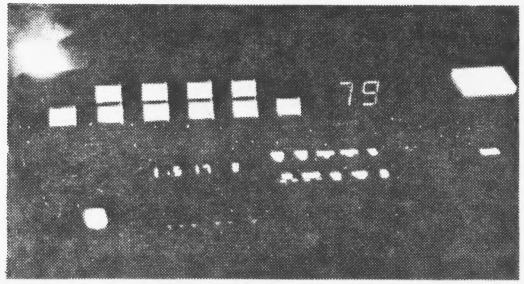
"Toot-toot" came a soft horn around a bend, followed by a pair of bright headlights, and an ultra-modern white train eased to a stop in the brightly-tiled Lake Merritt station. Wide doors slid quickly open and we popped into the two-car train with unnecessary haste. We were the only passengers, and the BART train was programmed to hold its doors open 20 seconds, but the "sense of urgency and dispatch", as Rich Tower calls it, made us act as if the rapid transit system were already carrying thousands of hustling commuters around the Bay Area.

This test run was one of many now underway to debug the computer-controlled system. This night some fixtures had vibrated off the subway ceiling, and their presence near the tracks had made the computer act as if a train were occupying the area, automatically holding back the second set of equipment also being tested. While train 2 waited for workers to clear the debirs, the doors of our train--made up of "A" units 115 and 119, each with operator controls at one end--closed, and with a brief pause we began a smooth, fast acceleration away from Lake Merritt.

"Train 115 to Lake Merritt Control" intoned the operator into a radio-telephone, "Be advised that we had no automatic stop at Fruitvale." The Lake Merritt complex in Oakland houses the central control of the BART system, administrative offices, and a subway station. The train operator was reporting that we'd just passed the Fruitvale elevated station on our southward trip with only an automatic slowing to 35 mph, but no stop. I could picture infuriated patrons wavings sweaters and briefcases at us had this been an actual operation. Back at Lake Merritt, computer operators sat behind a large console, watching lights flash on a huge wall diagram of the system, indicating the position of our train, with color codes to signal the status of our train's functioning. Speculating upon the problem we'd encountered, one made some reply to our operator. In another room behind the wall diagram, rows of computers busily tape recorded every event of the evening's work for later analysis.

Thru the offset windshield of our train, the ties made a stroboscopic pattern in the bright headlights. A

green digital display on the driver's panel read 80, our top speed of the night. Occasionally the computer man would switch us from one track to the other, just for practice. We'd slow to 26 mph, then hit the switch with a definite lurch. Normally this would occur infrequently. Tonight we were running mostly on the "wrong" track to avoid the stalled train at Lake Merritt.

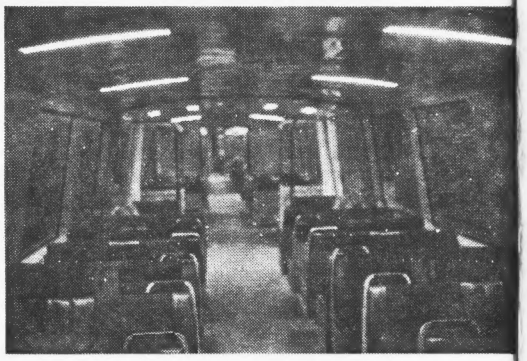


The driver's panel: you are traveling at 79mph.

In the fog-patched darkness outside, the lights of the Eastbay hills were sprinkled out in star-cluster patterns. We passed occasional cars on the adjoining freeway, and wondered if their occupants were staring at us. The view from this elevated track was most engaging, at least after dark--a whole new perspective on a portion of East Oakland long familiar from ground level. We thought what a hit this run will be with railfans or anybody who likes a fast, smooth ride with scenery. We pictured scores of movie camera fans crowding the big windows on opening day.

You felt little difference between 50 and 80 mph--except once when we entered the subway at a speed above 70. Then your ears felt the pressure clearly. The very rapid, smooth starts and stops of the train were most impressive. The ride on the wide-gauge, welded rail was superb. Train noise was about equivalent, at its peak, to that of a Pullman car at low speed. Speed changes, pre-programmed into the computer, were a little abrupt and jerky. There was obviously power to spare, but a human operator could have applied it a bit more gradually. Why not program the computer to do likewise?

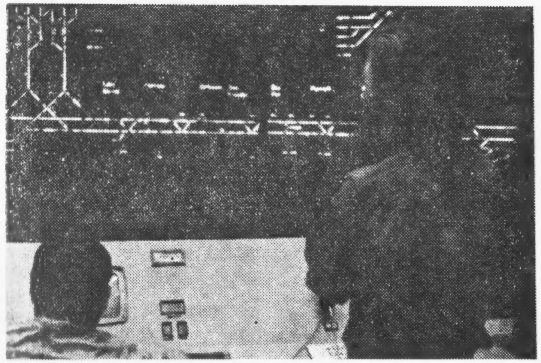
The Coliseum station, under constant night time illumination, came into view. We were to stop there and reverse our direction. Since the train wasn't obeying signals to halt at stations, the driver prepared to press a large, illuminated red "Stop" button. (The fault had now been tentatively traced to car 115's improper reading of electronic instructions emitted from trackside antennae near each station.) Our train halted under manual instruction, the driver turned off his dashboard console, and four of us--two passengers, driver and observer--trotted to the rear to set up operations at a similar console in car 119. When longer trains are run, "B" units without control modules will be cut in between pairs of "A" units to form trains up to 10 cars long.



Interior of the test train.

We reversed our trip to Lake Merritt, this time properly stopping under automatic control at each station, waiting 20 seconds for imaginary passengers to board or leave. While bugs remain to be worked out, the BART people were pleased that automatic operation is now possible. "Just a few weeks ago we couldn't even have done this," remarked John Day, a programmer of the new system. September 1 is still the target date for opening of the BART system in the Eastbay. Operations to San Francisco will follow about a year later.

We hated to leave the train as we alighted in the brightly-lit Lake Merritt station. It will be a sensation, thought I as we walked up the steps and past a big floodlighted fountain. It remains



At BART's central control console.

up to BART to see that the trains run smoothly without malfunction and that crowd-handling and ticket-taking are properly controlled. But the physical plant and fast, new equipment of BART will be enough in themselves to uplift the community and send other cities clamoring for similar facilities. It's true that BART wasn't built in a day, and that extraordinary problems of urban traffic could be alleviated right now in many places with relatively cheap upgrading of existing rail commuter facilities. But for the near future, a system like BART would be a boon to lots of congested and decaying cities.

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